New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1944

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NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"Mexican Hayride"

Musical comedy, with lyrics and music by Cole Porter; book by Herbert and Dorothy Fields; staging by Hassard Short; dances by Paul Haakon; settings by George Jenkins. Presented by Michael Todd at the Winter Garden Theatre, January 28, 1944.

THE NEW YORK TIMES
January 29, 1944

The Wonderful Bobby Clark Goes South of the Border in 'Mexican Hayride'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

LET this morning's news from Broadway be all to the good for a change. Bobby Clark is back. With cigar, painted glasses, wistful air and the murderous roll of rrrrrr, he arrived in town last evening at the Winter Garden in Mike Todd's "Mexican Hayride." Since Bobby is upholding the tradition of Broadway comedy, and Cole Porter has written some songs for other people—as well as Bobby—to sing, and Hassard Short has directed, and the book is harmless, set down the hayride as the most recent pleasure of the district. For the new musical swings right along in the cheerful tradition of such things, not brilliant, perhaps, but good. The theatre will settle for Bobby Clark these days, pending the millenium.

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And there is more to "Mexican Hayride" than a shower of ashes from Bobby's inevitable cigar. Herbert and Dorothy Fields have contributed a story about an American numbers racket king on the lam to Mexico, a story which allows for a lot of good will between sister republics—and doesn't get in the way of the actors. Mr. Porter has turned out a satisfactory score, with one very excellent song and the rest fair enough for their purpose. The scenery is spacious, the costumes are reds and greens and browns, the girls are pretty, the dancing is good and for the most part the show moves on its way without effort.

As befits a hero, Bobby is present in the greater part of "Mexican Hayride," coming in on a gallop when the book, as it does sometimes, shows a tendency to sag. He persuades a colleague to open the numbers racket in Mexico, he plays a flute in a strolling band, he sells tamales from a stand; he is, in short, a person of great good-will to have around a musical show. As the foil for the Clark humors there is George Givot, who used to bill himself as the "Greek Ambassador" but also does all right just south of the Rio Grande.

Since comedians cannot staff a whole show, Mr. Todd also has chosen wisely in finding people for the rest of his show. June Havoc, a pert and attractive young lady, has one of the roles and plays it just like that. Wilbur Evans has an unusually good voice for the musical comedy singing of love songs and the like, and Corinna Mura also has a clear voice and the ability to deal with a Porter song. Paul Haakon, in addition to dancing, has been in charge of the choreography, and while it is not flashy it undoubtedly is pleasant. There are specialty numbers by Bill Callahan, the Hermanos Williams Trio, Bobby Lane & Claire, Paul and Eva Reyes and Marta Nita, the latter a pretty and gay young dancer.

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Of Mr. Porter's score, the best number bears the title almost startling in its forthrightness, "I Love You," and is the property of Mr. Evans. "What a Crazy Way to Spend Sunday," "Carlotta" and "Abracadabra" also are good; the lyrics on the whole do not have the composer's usual convolusion of tongue-twisting words. Since the management is aware musical shows are in order for the girls, the comedians and the music, there is not too much rest between numbers, and the orchestra minds its own business and does not try to drown out the singers.

THE CAST

Lombo Campos	George Givot
Mrs. Augustus Adamson	Jean Cleveland
Eadie Johnson	Edith Meiser
Augustus Jr.	Eric Roberts
Mr. Augustus Adamson	William A. Lee
Joe Bascom (alias Humphrey Fish)	Bobby Clark
Montana	June Havoc
Picadors	Horton Henderson, Jerry Sylvon
Billy	Bill Callahan
Senor Martinez	David Leonard
Miguel Correres	Sergio DeKarlo
David Winthrop	Wilbur Evans
Henry A. Wallace	Byron Halstead
Jose (headwaiter)	Paul Reyes
A. C. Blumenthal	Larry Martin
Tillie Leeds	Lois Bolton
Lydia Toddle	Virginia Edwards
Carol (ex-King of Rumania)	Arthur Gondra
Mme. Lupescu	Dorothy Durkee
Lolita Cantine	Corinna Mura
Dagmar Marshak	Luba Malina
Bolero	Alfonso Pedroza
Chief of Police	Richard Bengall
Lottery Boy	Hank Wolff
Mrs. Molly Wincor	Jeanne Shelby
First Merchant	Paul Reyes
Second Merchant	Horton Henderson
Third Merchant	Hen Hernandez
Fourth Merchant	Jerry Sylvon
Fifth Merchant	Bobby Lane
Woman Vendor	Claire Anderson
Lottery Girl	Eva Reyes
Paul	Paul Haakon
Eleanor	Eleanor Tennis
Lillian	Marjory Leach

With the arrival of "Mexican Hayride," everything is in order at the Winter Garden. Bobby can begin laying in a large supply of cigars now.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
January 29, 1944

Clark to the Rescue

By HOWARD BARNES

IT is fortunate for "Mexican Hayride" that Bobby Clark and Cole Porter are in there pitching. The former is at his antic best, while the celebrated songwriter backs him up with two or three elegant ballads. Otherwise the new Winter Garden offering is a big, brash and generally undistinguished extravaganza. It boasts obviously expensive trappings, good-looking showgirls and a wide variety of nimble footwork. What it lacks is a defined outline, a funny book and sustained pace. The chief clown and the music-maker are likely to make you forget the show's defects, particularly in a second act, which is about fifty times better than the first.

• • •

The second stanza in this new Michael Todd production is superior principally because Clark is on stage most of the time. As a numbers racketeer, seeking haven and fresh fields for plucking suckers in Mexico, he has a part which gives him a chance to have a comic field day, lines or no lines. When he toots a flute, disguised as a Mariachi player, or peddles tortillas made up as a Mexican squaw, he takes over the proceedings so exuberantly and humorously that "Mexican Hayride" can scarcely fail to be a rousing success. Since his wonderful cavorting is accompanied by the most fetching of the songs and dances, the carnival literally pulls itself up by its bootstraps.

• • •

Clark has no such miraculous song number as "The Roue of Reading, Pa." in his latest musical comedy assignment, but he makes the utmost out of such ditties as "Girls" and "Count Your Blessings" and lopes up and down the stage on other occasions giving ludicrous emphasis to medleys. June Havoc, playing the role of a femine bull-fighter and Wilbur Evans, as an embassy attache on the trail of the numbers racket king, handle the romantic Cole Porter tunes and handle them extremely well. The latter, who is trying his hand for the first time at musical show nonsense, is especially good. He is assured without ever being hammy and his singing of "I Love You" might have been reprised several more times than it is.

• • •

Notable among the other principals is, of course, Paul Haakon. His bull-fighter dance, which comes at the climax of the entertainment, is a striking bit of choreography. His direction of the other dancing is lively and imaginative. Paul and Eva Reyes do a neat turn and there are assorted terpsichorean interruptions to a dreary plot, from cartwheels to taps. Corinna Mura sings rather too expressively; George Givot pulls his usual Greek dialect stunt and Luba Malina and a number of other specialists contribute to a bulging carnival. In his staging Hassard Short has done what he could with the sway-backed book by Herbert and Dorothy Fields. Bobby Clark does far better, by simply being his most amusing self. To him must go major credit for a show which redeems itself none too soon.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
January 29, 1944

Mexican Hayride Lavish, Beautiful

By BURTON RASCOE

ALADDIN TODD rubbed his wonderful lamp (the other one) at the Winter Garden last night and lifted us into a dream-world of splendor, mirth, melody and enchantment. . . . Plus Bobby Clark, with his painted-on spectacles, his cigar, his coltish back-kick and a whole new bag of hilarious antics, including that of playing classical music on the flute while disguised as a Mexican minstrel (so he thought; though it would appear that the theatrical costumer in Mexico City mistook his English and supplied him wth a medieval jongleur's costume instead).

And plus June Havoc, a lovely and bewitching darling of a comedienne, whom you will (I think) simply be crazy about. And plus Corinna Mura, a saucy and sultry Spanish beauty, who sings (with or without guitar) ravishingly. And plus what seemed like thousands of others.

Which is by way of saying that if you can get tickets to Mexican Hayride, which opened at the Winter Garden last night, you are lucky. It more than lives up to the advance reports on it that have been whispered to me by my undercover men, in spite of the censorious vigilance of Sgt. Bill Doll, USA, and it justifies the tremendous amount of time and money that has been spent on it. The production which Hassard Short has lavished on it simply makes it—even if it had nothing else at all to recommend it—one of the most beautiful spectacles ever seen on the stage.

Cole Porter Hit

But it has nearly everything else to recommend it also—at least after a rather slow start, which was owing, no doubt to overtraining on the part of the cast; things didn't really get going until the fourth scene of the first act, when Wilbur Evans stepped out and sang a superb new Cole Porter song which matches his Night and Day—I Love You. It touches the heart and spine—hummable, sing-

able, catchy, exciting—a hit song not of the show, but of the year.

Still a bit woozy from having drunk in so much opulence of entertainment I find it difficult to catalog all of the special merits. But, first, there are the music and lyrics of Cole Porter, into which he has put the best of his sentiment and his wit and his idiosyncratic melodic subtlety. Besides I Love You (and others) he has two comic hits—Abracadabra and Count Your Blessings—sung with vivacity and zingo by Miss Havoc. The latter is a mortuary recitative, with innumerable jingles, about why it is better to be alive than dead—the tune being derived from a Moody and Sanky hymn that is a great favorite with street-corner revivalists. Miss Havoc has her own way of clowning when she sings, which makes her as delightful to watch as to hear.

Then there is a book by Herbert and Dorothy Fields, which is inspired, contemporary, satirical, logical in development and full of ingenious incidents to draw Bobby Clark on the stage. The story tells of Joe Bascom, alias Humphrey Fish (Mr. Clark), and of his being in Mexico, on the lam from charges of running a numbers racket in Harlem and of swindles in four other states. He is not only a fugitive from justice, but a fugitive from a wife (a shrew, comically portrayed, by Marjory Leach).

In Mexico City Mr. Clark unwittingly finds himself drawn into the fast and fashionable world, infested by Carol and Mme. Lupescu, A. C. Blumenthal and other exiles, when a girl toreador (Miss Havoc) throws the severed ear of the bull she has just killed to her sweetheart in the gallery and it lands in Mr. Clark's lap—making him the hero of the hour and the object of excessive attentions, feminine as well as that of the gendarmerie. He learns of the government lottery and sets up his own competing one with money swindled out of Miss Havoc, whom he had known when he was a sharper traveling with the same rodeo outfit. His devices to escape the consequences of his crimes lead him into all the colorful spots of Mexico that you have heard about—from the Merced market to Xohimilco and from Ciro's to the Palace at Chepultapec.

These scenes permit Mr. Short to construct and enliven 10 extravagantly colorful sets and give Mary Grant an opportunity to let her costuming sense enjoy itself. There are excellent dance specialties, including those of Bill Callahan and Paul and Eva Reyes. The eight show girls are statuesque beauties, reminiscent of Ziegfeld's best days, and with them are 51 other singers and dancers in the chorus. An excellent orchestra is presided over by dynamic Harry Levant.

Mexican Hayride, in a phrase, is on the beam and going places.

THE NEW YORK SUN
January 29, 1944

'Mexican Hayride,' Whoping Fiesta, Brings Bobby Clark to Winter Garden

By WARD MOREHOUSE

UPON the site of the American Horse Exchange, a Broadway institution of many seasons ago, Michael Todd has now placed a big and beautiful fiesta which he calls "Mexican Hayride." It has glitter, rhythm, Cole Porter tunes and Bobby Clark, and it will stampede the Winter Garden for months to come.

Bobby Clark, the erstwhile circus acrobat, who is getting to be the theater's favorite clown, is back with his leer, his grimace and his gleaming eye. Also, his bouncng cane, his strut and his caperings, and this time he's in the role of old Joe Bascom, alias Humphrey Fish, who has tangled with the Law in the States, and flees into Mexico where he continues operation of a numbers racket and where his troubles really begin. But whatever his predicament or his disguise, he's really marvelous.

If "Mexican Hayride" is short on anything it's comedy, notwithstanding the presence of Bobby Clark. The boys and girls who do the books for the song-and-dance shows have been having their difficulties this season and the usually proficient team of Herbert and Dorothy Fields stumbles a bit. I expected them to do more with a libretto which takes Clark to the bullfight country. But shortcomings on book material will hardly prove a detriment to a show as colorful and as bountiful as the new one which square-jawed Mike Todd, Minneapolis-born, has now given to this town.

The girls in "Mexican Hayride" are lovely, the costumes (by Mary Grant) are imaginative, Cole Porter has provided a first-rate score. You will like such tunes as "Count Your Blessings," "There Must Be Some One for Me" and "I Love You." Hassard Short has done, of course, a superb job of staging and lighting. As Broadway seasons come and go, our Mr. Short becomes an increasingly important figure in the amusement business. It's the theater's good fortune that he turned in his make-up box years ago and gave up acting (remember "East Is West"? . . . "Peg o' My Heart"?) for stage direction.

Besides the bounding Bobby Clark, Mr. Todd has engaged other clever and interesting people. . . . June Havoc, George Givot, Wilbur Evans, Corinna Mura and Paul Haakon, of the magical dances. Miss Havoc, in top form and looking quite fetching, does well with Cole Porter's songs. She will be stopping this show night after night. I also liked the Hermanos Williams trio, the hoofing of Bill Callahan, and the settings of George Jenkins. Mr. Todd has really splashed color all over the stage of the big and historic playhouse. A Ziegfeldian eyeful, this new production. From a pictorial standpoint I am sure the Master would approve.

So, with Billy Rose dug in at Broadway and 53rd street, and Mike Todd now taking over at Al Jolson's old stand, the northward movement of New York theatricals continues . . . "Mexican Hayride" has no inspired libretto, but the joke shortage won't matter. The show is spectacularly beautiful—and it has Bobby Clark.

"Mexican Hayride" joins the town's super hits; Mr. Todd has outdone himself.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
January 30, 1944

The Ride Is Worth It With Mr. Clark

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

CHALK up another hit for Mike Todd, and another hilarious prance for Bobby Clark. Master Clark is the great thing about *Mexican Hayride*, but beyond that, it's soundly in the tradition of big Broadway musicals—lavish, vivid, primed with lively dancing and studded with likeable personalities. For a good half of the first act it can't pull itself off the ground and threatens to become a sumptuous bore. But the bad news is premature, and once the show gets going, and Bobby Clark with it, it keeps getting better and better.

The creators of *Mexican Hayride* have crossed our Southwest border more in quest of antics than of atmosphere, which is just as well, since senoritas, gauchos and guitars can wear out their welcome pretty quickly. This is a tourist Mexico; even Cole Porter has largely passed up exotic and languorous rhythms in favor of humorous ditties for Bobby Clark and June Havoc. Mr. Clark, on the present occasion, is a gentleman in the numbers racket who has come to Mexico because he is wanted by the police in a good many of the United States. At a bullfight he is accidentally chosen to be a kind of honored American citizen, a role that entails more publicity than a gentleman in hiding finds attractive. Hence—and happily—Mr. Clark spends most of the evening going about disguised. Your time will be well spent observing him first as a mariachi player with a flute and a fleeting resemblance to some missing Marx Brother, and later as an Indian squaw with false teeth. The false teeth mate very prettily with the painted spectacles.

Indeed, once the book perks up, Mr. Clark is in splendid form with his accomplished leer, his uninhibited cane and his sprightly locomoton. He also careens through a song called *Girls* and helps out in another called *Count Your Blessings*. Neither rendition is to be sneezed at.

• • •

June Havoc further enhances the lighter side of the evening; in *Mexican Hayride* she joins that small company of musical comedy actresses who combine attractive looks with a winning and amusing personality. Besides joining in *Count Your Blessings* she puts across two not highly inspired numbers called *There Must Be Someone For Me* and *Abracadabra*.

Cole Porter has taken it rather easy this time. Beyond his light stuff, he has provided one pretty fetching tune, *I Love You*, which is put over handsomely by Wilbur Evans, whose fine voice should be an asset to future musicals.

• • •

Much more is to be said for the dancing than the tunes: Paul Haakon has arranged some lively, unarty routines and a number of pleasant specialties. Besides his own very good ones with Eleanor Tennis and Eva Reyes, there is nice work by Bobby Lane and Claire, Bill Callahan, and the acrobatic Hermanos Williams Trio.

Mr. Jenkins' sets are attractive and Mary Grant's costumes properly vivid. John Kennedy has staged the book neatly—it is a far from brilliant one, but it gives Bobby Clark his opportunities—and Hassard Short's overall direction provides smoothness and taste. *Mexican Hayride* is the big straight musical show with the first-rate comic that Broadway, this season, has waited for and needed.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
January 29, 1944

Bobby Clark, June Havoc Make a Joyride of 'Mexican Hayride'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

MICHAEL TODD'S musical comedy, "Mexican Hayride," is bounteous, boldly beautiful, properly spotted with good songs and performed by people who know how. For those who want a big evening, there it is, at the Winter Garden.

The star is Bobby Clark, and that ageless imp was never in better form. He growls, he leers, he scuttles; he pole-vaults with his cane and cracks his heels like a frisking lamb; he appears disguised as a flute-player in a Mexican street orchestra, and again as a buck-toothed squaw selling tortillas, enchiladas and tamales (these disguises being necessary because of the FBI, which wants him for a numbers racket rap).

For a playmate Mr. Clark has June Havoc, and from now on Gypsie Rose Lee can for my money be known as June Havoc's sister. This lady has a facade which is nothing like a Greek temple, but noble all the same; a pair of legs Mistinguett could have envied, and the most remarkable observation platform since Henry Dreyfuss designed the Twentieth Century Limited.

Costumes Are Superb

But, if I were to pick a star of the show, I would put up in lights the name of Mary

Grant, Miss Grant, of whom I'd never heard, designed the Mexican costumes. With money no object, she has filled the stage with a succession of dazzling, lovely garments which make you feel gay every moment you see them. It is designing at its best, for the costumes make the spirit of the show.

Being a standard mixture of songs, dances and funny sayings, "Mexican Hayride" can be called a typical American musical comedy. Its Herbert and Dorothy Fields plot is practically nothing, thank goodness. Bobby Clark is on the lam in Mexico, June Havoc is a female bullfighter who works in opera-length hose, George Givot is a Mexican promoter whom Bobby persuades to start a numbers racket south of the border, and Wilbur Evans is present as a representative of the American consulate.

A New Song Hit

Mr. Evans' chief job is to sing a Cole Porter number, "I Love You," which enthralled last night's first-nighters. It is one of those smooth, easy-running jobs like "Night and Day" or "Begin the Beguine," and it is a certain hit.

Porter's score, and its treatment by Harry Levant's orchestra, are first-rate. There are Latin numbers like "Sing to Me, Guitar," and Corinna Mura, who knows the business, is there to sing them. There are bright and sufficiently sharp lyrics like "There Must Be Someone for Me" and "Abracadabra" over which Miss Havoc shivers her timbers.

Paul Haakon and Eleanor Tennis perform some exciting dances, and there are excellent specialty numbers by Paul and Eva Reyes, the Hermanos Williams Trio, Bill Callahan and others. Whatever any of them does has the life and precision of the true professional.

Settings Lovely, Too

Apace with the costumes are the sets by George Jenkins, which are a Cook's Tour of Mexico City and environs—a bull ring, a bedroom, Ciro's, the flea market, a gas station, the terrace of the palace at Chepultepec.

The chorus is large; the girls are big and beautiful, and Paul Haakon's ensemble dances are interesting, fresh without being tricky, and well executed by both men and women. Hassard Short has done his usual slick job with staging and lights.

"Mexican Hayride" is the first $5.50 musical in a dozen years, and I think it will pay off for Mr. Todd. Its one defect—a few moments of slowness in the first act—is soon forgotten, and the rest is pleasure. And the show is clean.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

January 29, 1944

Michael Todd Offers Musical Comedy Starring Bobby Clark

By ROBERT GARLAND

YES! Yes! Yes, indeed!

Which is to report that Broadway in general, and the drama critics in particular, can continue their custom of writing the word "fabulous" in front of the name of Michael Todd. For the truth is that, last night at the Winter Garden, the fabulous Todd produced a musical comedy so funny, so tuneful, so beautiful, that you could hardly believe your ears and eyes.

This musical-comedy-in-a-thousand is the "Mexican Hayride" of which you've been hearing; a rich, rowdy and resplendant extravaganza written by Herbert and Dorothy Fields, staged and lighted by Hassard Short, adorned with music and lyrics by Cole Porter and acted and sung for all it's worth—which is a plenty—by Bobby Clark and a six-star supporting cast.

Even so, you can't tell me it isn't the fabulous Michael who has kept the piece good and knockabout; who, in spite of all the lilt and lusciousness, has seen that its feet—except when dancing—are alway on the ground. If his actors raise a roughhouse among his silks and songs and satins, it is the fabulous Todd who urges them to do so.

• • •

Mr. United States

It would seem that Joe Bascom, alias Humphrey Fish, alias Bobby Clark, finds himself in Mexico. He has been a bad boy north of the border where he actually sold numbers, instead of adding and subtracting them. But, south of the border, he is Mr. United States, the Good Neighbor of the Week, and the trusted friend of Montana, the lady bullfighter; Carol, ex-King of Roumania; Mme. Lupescu and A. C. Blumenthal.

As long as it lasts, this is great fun for both Mr. United States and the audience. But when his aliases catch up with him, accompanied by the Mexican police, it is even greater fun for the latter. For the Joe Bascom, who is the Humphrey Fish, who is Bobby Clark, becomes a fugitive from justice south of the border as well as north of it—it is then he goes into disguise.

First as a wandering fluteplayer, then as female-of-the-species who sells tortillas and smokes large black cigars, our double-fugitive keeps the Winter Garden in a turmoil. Bobby Clark is at his rough-and-ready best all evening. But he manages to outdo even his own uproarious best as that tortilla-packing mamma. Unlike a certain out-of-town reviewer, I'll not nominate him for President. An incomparable clown is mighty hard to find.

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New Top-Notcher

In Bobby Clark's six-star supporting cast, June Havoc, as Montana, the lady bull-fighter, is tops. That little lady's got everything. She can sing. She can dance. She can charm. Two of her solo numbers are among the high-spots of a high-spotted evening—"There Must Be Someone for Me" and "Abracadabra." But the melody you'll be hearing the most of is "I Love You," sung wholeheartedly by the wholehearted Wilbur Evans.

George Givot, the former Greek Ambassador who, in good old vaudeville days, had his Embassy at the Palace Theatre, is now a Mexican. And a good one! Corinna Mura, a senorita from Texas, has a beautiful number called "Carlotta," which she sings with skill and feeling. Paul Haakon not only staged the dances, which are colorful and imaginative, but helps out in some of them.

In a few closing words, the fabulous Michael Todd has turned the trick again. He has brought to town a large, luxurious and best of all, laugh-filled entertainment to be placed among Broadway's top-notchers. No pains have been spared to make it beautiful, melodious and funny. Never has Bobby Clark been more hilarious.

"Mexican Hayride" is an earfull, an eyefull and an uproarious rowdy-dow. And all at the same time!

THE NEW YORK POST

January 29, 1944

'Mexican Hayride' Stars Bobby Clark at the Winter Garden

By WILELLA WALDORF

UP to the intermission at the Winter Garden last night, "Mexican Hayride" threatened to be a beautiful bore, weighed down by a very limp book that left even Bobby Clark a bit wilted. But after the intermission, something happened. Caught running an illegal lottery in competition with the government, Bobby escaped the authorities and turned up in a series of hilarious disguises.

Joining a band of itinerant musicians, he operated on the flute with impetuous virtuosity and all was going well until he lost his wig, whereupon it became necessary for him to disappear once more and turn up again as an Indian squaw with as fine a set of false teeth as ever graced a pawn shop window. Since Bobby still wears his painted-on spectacles, smokes a cigar and howls like a coyote or yowls like a tom-cat when aroused, he was an immense success as the mother of a papoose who, oddly enough, also wore painted-on spectacles.

As far as we are concerned, this was the high point of the evening, especially since it suddenly occurred to us while Bobby was toothily peddling his tortillas and tamales that he bore a haunting resemblance to Katharine Hepburn.

This cheerful episode was followed by one of those merry Cole Porter songs "Count Your Blessings," for which lyrics are written by the yard, anticipating the inevitable demands for encore after encore. Bobby, still with a feather in his wig and those teeth well to the fore, joined June Havoc and George Givot in this trio, which rocked the house.

The act, and the show, were then brought to a close with a striking bull-fight dance by Paul Haakon, and we left the theatre laughing and still a little dazzled by the exquisite colors of Mary Grant's luscious Mexican costumes displayed against a series of interesting and attractive settings designed by George Jenkins.

Don't Miss the Second Act

It is not customary to review the second act of a musical comedy first, but the fact is, we have been trying to forget the first one, which was long and, despite the lively colors and an occasional dreamy Porter tune, had a tendency to lull us to sleep.

Herbert and Dorothy Fields have failed to contribute their usual snappy book to "Mexican Hayride." After tucking a scene at Ciro's into the vague plot, featuring impersonations of such notables as A. C. Blumenthal, ex-King Carol of Rumania and Mme. Lupescu, their inventive powers seem to have gone on holiday. Perhaps they, too, were overcome by the languorous climate and simply decided to take a siesta.

Whatever the cause, they failed to provide anything overly comical for Bobby Clark to say or do in that first act, which is a major crime, and there was a disjointed effect about the whole thing suggesting that strenuous efforts had been made to do something about it without success. A number of specialty dancers were tossed in at intervals and now and then a singable Cole Porter song came along, amiably delivered by Wilbur Evans in his pleasant baritone; purveyed with wiggles by June Havoc, who isn't Gypsy Rose Lee's sister for nothing; or warbled in more or less sultry fashion by Corinna Mura with or without guitar, depending upon the mood.

That they all sometimes seemed a little uncomfortable in their assignments is not surprising when you consider what arbitrary plotting went on from time to time, and with even Bobby Clark somewhat subdued, we were beginning to wonder if there ever would be anything to get excited about beyond the scenery and costumes, when along came the second act and there we were, as usual, all but falling into the aisle laughing at Bobby.

Some Pleasant Cole Porter Songs

Mr. Porter's songs include "I Love You" and "Carlotta," both nice to hear; a charming little chorus number to open the second act entitled "What a Crazy Way to Spend a Sunday," and something called "Abracadabra" that, with all due respect to Miss Havoc and her fanny-tossing, cried aloud to be lifted to the rafters by Ethel Merman or Mary Jane Walsh.

If you go to see "Mexican Hayride" and begin to wonder after a while what on earth you came for, take a firm grip on yourself and stick it out until after the intermission. The second act is worth any amount of torture, if only for a chance to see Bobby wear those teeth.

"Wallflower"

Comedy by Mary Orr and Reginald Denham; staging by Mr. Denham and settings by Samuel Leve. Presented by Meyer Davis at the Cort Theatre, January 26, 1944.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
January 27, 1944

Maestro Meyer Davis Produces Orr-Denham 'Starless' Play

By ROBERT GARLAND

LET me warn you that "Wallflower" is no play to which a girl should take her mother. Or to which a boy should take his father, either. But let me tell you that it is very, very funny. Last night, at the Cort, the laughter was long, loud and luxurious, punctuated by an occasional Rabelaisian roar that warmed the cockles of the more unruly hearts.

This new comedy, this "Wallflower," by Mary Orr and Reginald Denham, marks the debut of Meyer Davis, the not-so-old-maestro, as a full-fledged theatrical producer. With his checkbook in many a success and failure, here at last he goes it solo, here for the first time the words "Meyer Davis presents" appear right out in the open on Broadway.

Producer Davis has put himself out to do right by his dramatists. He has assembled a fine and, to my way of thinking, delightfully starless company of players. He has given them a fine and, structurally speaking, astonishingly helpful background by Samuel Leve. And he has permitted one of the authors to do the staging. That, too, is fine.

Re-enter Charity

Do you remember the old Joe Miller jests about Charity who began at home. That, to put it politely, is the innocent little seed from which the three acts and six scenes of "Wallflower" grew. Nowadays, Charity, who has changed her name to Jackie Linnet, lives in Ironville, Ohio. Ironville, like Charity's old home town, is definitely dull.

That's what she and her sister Joy, say. But to the thirsty onlooker, out in the audience, it is difficult to figure how Ironville, or any other place, could be dull with so much drinking going on. In the Linnets' rumpus room, where the action of the piece occurs, cocktails flow like water, Scotch flows like cocktails, champagne flows like Scotch.

Even so, Papa Linnet, who is a judge, is worried about the bad behavior of almost every young Ironvillelian but his own. And his own's young friends and fellow drinkers. So—I give you three guesses—his beloved daughter Jackie goes out with an intoxicated wolf disguised as a Princeton Tiger, and gets herself in trouble. Not real last-act trouble. But it looks troublesome enough for a time.

Actors Know How

More than this, I should not tell you. More than this I cannot tell you. More than this I need not tell you. Reading between my lines, you're sure to realize that Nature still has a way with her; that an ancient anecdote can take an ingenious turn that, when dramatized and set up on a lighted stage, the facts of life can be a good deal funnier than the birds, the flowers and the bees.

At the Cort, they are! Actors, assembled by Producer Davis, know how to handle a difficult situation, how to get at least three meanings out of a double-entendre. And in the most blameless, open-hearted fashion! Keep your eye on Mamma, Papa, Joy and Jackie Linnet, intrusted to Kathryn Givney, Walter Greaza, Sunnie O'Dea and the Mary Rolfe who pretends to be the wallflower of the title.

Joel Marston, a newcomer, reminds you of a younger Glenn Anders as bad boy Warren. Vilma Kurer, a real-live refugee, is a sheer delight as a refugee maid. Leona Powers is a bright and brittle small-town matron . . . Oh, well, even if the young folks should leave the Old Folks at home, the Old Folks will just have to go and see "Wallflower" secretly on their own. It's far too funny for anyone to miss.

THE CAST

Jessamine Linnet	Kathryn Givney
Brigitte	Vilma Kurer
Mrs. Hennicut	Ann Dere
Andrew Linnet	Walter N. Greaza
Joy Linnet	Sunnie O'Dea
Jackie Linnet	Mary Rolfe
Bruce	James McMahon
Chet	Michael King
Warren James	Joel Marston
Wardwell James	Fred Irving Lewis
Dixie James	Leona Powers
Jasper	Kurt Richards
Bobbie	Charles Laffin
Ruth Hennicut	Mary Orr
Larry Oakleaf	Frank McNellis

THE NEW YORK SUN
January 27, 1944

'Wallflower,' New Cort Comedy, Has Good Intentions – Slips in Second Act

By WARD MOREHOUSE

MARY ORR, a new girl at playwriting, and Reginald Denham, an experienced hand at direction, have collaborated in the writing of "Wallflower," a comedy that has a nice enough beginning in the first act, goes to pieces in the second and gets noisy and frantic in the third.

Really, as this new play began at the Cort last evening it seemed that Miss Orr and Mr. Denham were out to write an ingratiating comedy of the young in Ironville, Ohio, and develop two good characters in the step-sisters of the Linnet household—Joy, the glamour girl, who sent all the boys into spins, and Jackie, on the quiet side, and the wallflower. But the play gets away from its authors, and their dialogue, on the flip and frank side, doesn't save it. To me some of the cracks seemed more labored than funny, but I readily admit that there were lines that brought explosions of laughter from certain sections of the house.

"Wallflower," besides introducing a new playwriting team to Broadway, presents Meyer Davis for the first time in the role of theatrical impresario and it marks the dramatic debut of the decorative Sunnie O'Dea, only lately of the song and dance stage. She does well with it.

Mary Rolfe, who made an excellent impression in Maxwell Anderson's "The Eve of St. Mark," has the part of the sister who isn't taken to the big dance at the country club but who finally breaks loose, gets herself caught in a raid with a neighbor boy, crashes Page One, and quite scandalizes the town of Ironville. Miss Rolfe is a young actress who can play a quiet scene with genuine feeling, but there are few such scenes in the new comedy. I hope that Miss Orr and Mr. Denham will write her a better part in their next play, and do the same for Walter N. Greaza.

"Wallflower," with which the Cort Theater hopes to break its jinx and end its parade of transients, gives me the feeling that Miss Orr has a talent for stage writing that can be developed, and I suggest that when she and Mr. Denham do try again that they go at it more quietly. They can write a better play than "Wallflower." They can improve the playing of this present comedy by cutting several of the repetitious scenes, particularly in the third act.

Meyer Davis has given the play an attractive production. The setting by Samuel Leve is what I'd like my rumpus room to look like if I ever have one, and the cast is good enough. And it should be noted, too, that Joel Marston is excellent as the boy who gets himself in a jam and comes out with a bride.

In these gold-rushed times in the Broadway area there well may be a public for "Wallflower," which has good intentions and is built for laughter. It's a comedy in the "Kiss and Tell" category but is by no means as good.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
January 27, 1944

'Wallflower Isn't Too Awfully Funny, But It Does Get Laughs

By JOHN CHAPMAN

THERE were many gay shrieks from the audience at the Cort last night and I had a couple of laughs myself; so now, 15 minutes after the end of the play, it is my callous nature to report that I don't think "Wallflower" is a very good comedy.

It is thinly stretched, too long by a quarter hour, and those shrieks it garnered came from the same joke—sex. My chuckles came mostly from the well-timed yelps of exasperation by Walter N. Greaza, playing a dazed father, and the rather winning youthful goofiness of Joel Marston as "a wolf masquerading as a Princeton tiger."

"Wallflower" is how they combine "Cinderella" and "The Ugly Duckling" in Ironville, Ohio, when Mary Orr and Reginald Denham needle up the stories with some gags and get a pair of adolescents into an apparently sinful situation.

Home From the Campus

Sunnie O'Dea and Mary Rolfe are a couple of gals come home to Ironville from the UCLA campus at Westwood, Los Angeles. Sunnie, a fine blonde dish with a good line, gets all the dates. Mary, not too mousy but quiet and nice, doesn't get any.

Mary doesn't get any, that is, until young Marston has proposed to and been rejected by the blonde. Then Marston fills up on Greaza's whisky, takes Mary out for a drive and is next found with her by the police in a bedroom of an Ohio roadhouse. This is very bad all around, and particularly bad for Papa Greaza, for he is the assistant D. A. of the town and his pet project is a nice, clean, municipal recreation center for youths.

Everything is all right when it's time for one to go home, of course. The youngsters have been decent and innocent all the time. But Miss Orr and Mr. Denham in the mean time have had opportunity to toss in all the gags about sex and a girl's virtue they could think of—and some that others had thought up first.

Family Fights, Too

I am afraid, now that I look it over, that I may have dirtied up this copy too much. In fairness one must say that the playwrights have also managed to dwell, some times amusingly, on other matters for laughter, such as small-town club life and family bickerings.

Denham has directed the comedy well enough, but could have edited himself and his co-author more severly. Kathryn Givney plays Greaza's wife with tart humor. Fred Irving Lewis is a stock town banker and Leona Powers his wife. The setting, a basement rumpus room where Sunnie O'Dea's youthful worshippers can always get a free drink, is by Samuel Leve.

Well, anyway, this is one comedy of adolescents this season in which nobody appears or pretends to be expecting the stork. There is only one joke about pregnancy. This is the first independent production of Meyer Davis, the bandleader, who recently has been much publicized as a backer of shows.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
January 27, 1944

Quick Henry The Flit

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THERE were those in last night's audience who appeared to find *Wallflower* amusing. Not to beat about the bush, I found it thoroughly offensive. Sex treated with high animal spirits, or with real wit, is decidedly all to the good. But a comedy that uses sex only for the snickers and guffaws in it is something else again; and when such a comedy is concerned with the very young, it can be appalling.

Wallflower, for an act, is a badly written but harmless and mildly animated work on the old theme of the pretty sister and the plain one. I settled down for two more acts of that peculiar jargon that young people seem to use only in plays; for family run-ins; and for ugly-duckling heartaches that in due time would be transformed into the joys of courtship and conquest. But in the second act, *Wallflower* just collapsed for a time, rambled and slithered, and then took to sex. First there was a lot of brash talk about it. Then a young Princetonian who had been rejected by the glamorous sister, got tight and bade the stay-at-home come out for a ride. When, later that night, the cops raided a roadhouse, they found the pair in an upstairs bedroom. Eventually, of course, the whole thing was explained in the purest terms; but meanwhile the whole thing was exploited in the most suggestive manner.

* * *

The trouble with *Wallflower* isn't really the plot; from something not radically different have come very likeable farces like *Kiss and Tell*. The trouble is the authors' equal and distressing lack of talent and taste. They have no good dialogue to offer and no sound character drawing; their young people are neither attractive nor funny; their picture of family life is too incredible even for farce. All they can do is wring the last drop of double-meaning out of everything that comes along, never once alkalizing it with wit.

The production is of a piece with the play, crudely directed and hammily acted. As the two girls, Mary Rolfe and Sunnie O'Dea tried to give some shred of credibility to their roles but they scarcely succeeded.

THE NEW YORK POST
January 27, 1944

'Wallflower' Manages to Keep 'Em Laughing at the Cort

By WILELLA WALDORF

WHEN a wallflower leaps over the wall and goes on the loose, shocking events are apt to occur. This proverb is the theme of the new comedy by Mary Orr and Reginald Denham entitled "Wallflower" which Meyer Davis, the bandsman, produced last night at the Cort Theatre.

A sophisticated relative of "Kiss and Tell," it is constantly preoccupied with sex and might easily become nauseating in its persistent vulgarity were it not for the fact that it is studded with funny lines that almost always come over. The laughter was general last night. When we rushed for the doors the audience was still roaring. It was pretty obvious the Cort finally has a tenant that will stay a while.

Miss Orr, who wrote "Wallflower" in collaboration with Mr. Denham, the director, is an actress in what may be termed her spare time. She is now acting a small part in her own handiwork. As the dramatists dwindle away, the actresses are taking to writing the plays. So far it hasn't been a bad idea.

"Wallflower" doesn't pretend to be anything but a laugh-provoker, and it achieves its purpose. The authors are not precisely fussy. They aren't above introducing a Viennese maid who is adept at picking up American slang, and therefore greets important guests with a request to "Park your fannies" and trills "So long, you bums!" on seeing them out.

Mary Rolfe as the Wallflower Who Blossoms Out

As the play gets under way, however, the comedy becomes smarter and snappier in the Linnet family's "rumpus room" at Ironville, Ohio. There are enough guffaws in the second act alone to insure the success of "Wallflower" for some time to come, but the authors, or the management, or both, have taken no chances. The third act is heavily spiced with sexy innuendo that might easily become offensive in the hands of a less disarming cast.

Fortunately Mary Rolfe, as the Linnet family wallflower, and Joel Marston, as the boy she's always loved, but who has just proposed to her sister, are such pleasant kids they make it all sound merely gay, while Walter N. Greaza and Fred Irving Lewis are appropriately apoplectic as the two fathers, and Sunnie O'Dea, the musical comedy dancer, shows that she's not to be overlooked as a dramatic actress.

Sunnie plays Joy Linnet, the Wallflower's lovely blonde step-sister whose "compelling personality" has a fascinating effect on all the boys in the neighborhood—until the Wallflower herself gains some valuable publicity as a fallen woman and thereby becomes an even greater attraction.

Here is a play that brings a message of hope to all wallflowers. Oomph isn't everything, it says cheerily.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
January 27, 1944

Wallflower Is Bright, Clean and Refreshing

By BURTON RASCOE

WALLFLOWER. Make a note of the title. When you find yourself in need of a good laugh (which you probably do, right this minute) it is the name of a comedy you ought to see. It will fix you up—at least for the evening—unless your melancholia is congenital, chronic and beyond all aid. I'm almost willing to guarantee that.

Wallflower is at the Cort, where, instead of opening, it had to unfold, somewhat by fits and jerks, last night, because the process was interrupted so frequently by prolonged outbursts of spontaneous, unrestrained (and, sometimes, positively uncouth) laughter on the part of a delighted audience.

Not since Kiss and Tell (which Wallflower superficially, but not invidiously, resembles) entered upon its gloom-dispelling mission last mid-March, has there appeared on Broadway a play anything like as refreshing, bright, clean, charming and laugh-provoking as this semiserious satirical farce-comedy by Mary Orr and Reginald Denham.

Beauty Loses

It can be recommended to young and old, the ribald and the staid, the modest and the unrefined with equal earnestness, because, even though there are perhaps two or three words, or lines, intrinsically innocent, which unregenerate members of the audience may choose to misinterpret in a ribald manner, there is such a general air of sentimental homey good taste about the whole affair that I don't think any sensible person can take offense.

When I tell you that Wallflower is about two half-sisters, one of whom attracts the boys and the other does not, you know what is going to happen, in a domestic comedy, without my telling you. The shrinking violet is going to turn out to be the amorous lodestar and the other going to turn out to be just a flirt and a prude, of course. But in such a comedy plot, it is the filling in that counts; and Miss Orr and Mr. Denham have had many new, fresh, witty ideas about the filling-in process.

For one thing, they have done considerable research in the current slang, not of the teen-agers, as in Janie, and Kiss and Tell, but among the lads and lassies of draft age and just above. Sir William Craigie, who has just completed his monumental Dictionary of American English, would, I am afraid, throw up his hands and exclaim that all his work has been in vain, if he should drop in at the Cort some evening and catch some of the bizarre but pungent phrases that seem now to be current among the younger set.

To point up this language, the authors have introduced into the Linnet household of Ironville, Ohio, a refugee German maid who knows no English until she has picked up bits here, from the elder Linnets, and bits there, from the boys and girls who invade the rumpus room in the basement of the Linnet home, and mixed them up, saying, for instance, to adult guests "So long, you bums!" instead of "Excuse me and I'll notify madame."

Youth in Wartime

Andrew Linnet (Walter N. Greaza) is a judge, who has become greatly concerned over the increase in juvenile delinquency that has developed amid war conditions in Ironville and is seeking to interest the better element of the town in driving out the roadhouses and dives and establishing recreation centers, when he is confronted by the awful news that his daughter (the wallflower) and a neighbor boy (who had been one of the flies around his stepdaughter, the [illegible] have been caught in a raid in one of the dives. . . . But that is near the end of the story of the rivalry between the two girls, one of whom merely likes to attract attention and knows how to attract it and the other of whom is sadly and somewhat bitterly finding herself left out of everything.

There are quarrels between father and mother and between neighbors, as in Kiss and Tell, but this is not in imitation of the latter; the comedy stands well on its own feet. Leona Powers is the only one in the cast who distinguishes herself; but all the rest are competent and are directed by Mr. Denham to play their parts on broad comedy lines.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
January 27, 1944

A Wallflower Looks at Sex

By HOWARD BARNES

ADOLESCENT antics are given a ribald once-over in "Wallflower." It follows the general scheme of its several predecessors in the field, making much of a supposed seduction and the consternation of assorted parents. Unfortunately the subject matter is no longer very novel and the Cort Theater offering requires a heap of innuendo in the dialogue and slapstick in the action to generate laughter. On the whole it is a comic-strip show, broad as a barn door and not much craftier in design.

* * *

The production is at its funniest when the performers take over and leaven the script with portrayals which are on the verge of burlesque. Mary Rolfe, as the young girl designated in the title, and Sunnie O'Dea, as

her flirtatious step-sister, are attractive and fresh as paint in the slyer sections of the plot. Walter N. Greaza explodes all over the stage in the part of a crusader against juvenile delinquency whose daughter is picked up in a roadhouse in what the French would term flagrant delit. And Kathryn Givney, Fred Irving Lewis and Leona Powers make the most of stock situations and quips that you can anticipate at the start of every conversation.

• • •

The authors, Mary Orr and Reginald Denham, have bothered little with either style or subtlety in their comedy. A windy first act is dedicated to the marshalling of characters, including several young men in uniform who think that "the berries" and "jeepers creepers" are up-to-date slang phrases. There is far more merriment as the neglected sister decides to follow out her threat to "neck in the nude" and becomes the most popular girl in Ironville. The final stanzas, which sanctify the misstep, by disclosing a secret marriage, are obvious and far from hilarious.

• • •

As a reporter, it is my duty to tell you that a great many first-nighters were inordinately amused by the proceedings. Sex is a solid basis for humor and sex is discussed at considerable length in "Wallflower." Too often it is tasteless, even when whipped into gags and tag lines by the competent cast in the show. Incidentally, Meyer Davis has produced the piece handsomely and Mr. Denham has done better with his staging than his writing. There are obviously those who relish a farce of this sort, but include me out of the list.

THE NEW YORK TIMES
January 27, 1944

'Wallflower,' or the Story of an Ugly Duckling, Opens at the Cort Theatre

By LEWIS NICHOLS

SINCE the story about sex among the very young has been filling theatres of late, Mary Orr and Reginald Denham decided it would bear telling again. Their version opened last evening at the Cort under the title of "Wallflower," and as the first production of Meyer Davis, the orchestra leader, who hitherto has been associated in the backing of somewhat better shows. To say that "Wallflower" is just not good is perhaps to understate the case, for in much of its length it succeeds in being vulgar and unpleasant when it tries to be funny; it smirks when it tries to be gay.

• • •

Lacking originality for the evening, the authors are telling the one about two young girls, one pretty and attractive to the boys, the other a wallflower. Naturally, it is the latter who finally gets the man, and since the play is about sex among the very young she gets him in the way most subject to double entendre. If Miss Orr and Mr. Denham have missed any possible joke that can be made from a couple's being found upstairs in a raided roadhouse, the fault is not theirs. But since Hollywood beckons, and Hollywood has a Hays office to pass on such matters, something had to be done to clean up "Wallflower" at the end. The authors have been obedient; it was all very legal. Pshaw!

"Wallflower" bears some family resemblance to "Kiss and Tell," as well as to other similar plays—though with a difference. Those others have a certain charm about them; the young people behave like normal young people of adolescent years. To "Wallflower," however, the authors have brought a hardness of characterization—the double entendres are stressed to the exclusion of any human quality the group of youngsters might have. There are, to be sure, a number of amusing lines of dialogue, but the funny ones are pearls in an ocean of tedium.

• • •

Mary Rolfe plays the part of the unattractive sister who gets her man anyhow, and Sunny O'Dea is the blonde one who has a good many suitors but wishes to give them all up and move to New York. Walter N. Greaza is the head of the house, and gives a good performance within the confines of what he has to say. Leona Powers, Fred Irving Lewis and Kathryn Givney are some of the elders; James McMahon, Joel Marston and Michael King are among the youngsters. Samuel Leve has designed a rumpus room for the setting, and Mr. Denham has directed "Wallflower" no doubt the way he and Miss Orr wanted it.

"The Cherry Orchard"

Play by Anton Chekhov, translated by Irina Skariatina; staging by Eva Le Gallienne and Margaret Webster; settings by Motley. Presented by Carly Wharton and Miss Webster at the National Theatre, January 25, 1944.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
January 26, 1944

'The Cherry Orchard' Is Given An Admirable, Moving Revival

By JOHN CHAPMAN

UNDER the directorial guidance of Margaret Webster, Eva Le Gallienne, Joseph Schildkraut and company have given Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard" a lucid and affecting production which is quite splendidly performed.

This tragedy of human frustration, written with classic tenderness, was first given life 40 years ago by the Moscow Art Theatre. Miss Le Gallienne has done it at least twice before—during and just after her Civic Repertory days. Last night's presentation at the National Theatre was, I think, less lugubrious than it was those other times, and paradoxically more stirring.

The program, in fact, bills it as a comedy. It is a comedy in one dictionary sense, in that it involves the relationship of human beings; but certainly no one will ever bust a gusset laughing at it. It calls for tears and pity on both sides of the footlights. One thing I admired last night was that the players did not go strictly by the book and weep as often as Chekhov ordered in the stage directions.

The Mortgage Again

"The Cherry Orchard," a pioneer work in Russian realism, is without doubt the simplest, yet the most profound, of the hundreds of dramas that have been written about "the mortgage." Miss Le Gallienne's estate is to be sold for debts—and it is sold, and that's that. The house and the orchard aren't for the purposes of the plot and counterplot; they are merely places in which Chekhov's people can come into being, talk about themselves Russian-fashion, and be understood.

They become very real, these people, even in just a reading of the play. They are sorrowful or light-witted, clumsy or irresponsible, annoying or so touching you want to get up there and comfort them; they are lusty or shy, shallow or deep. And when they are properly portrayed on a stage they move into your consciousness and stay there, like all the other people you know well.

THE CAST

Lopahin (Yermolay Alexeyevitch)	Stefan Schnabel
Dunyasha (a maid)	Virginia Campbell
Epihodov	Rex O'Malley
Firs (an old valet)	A. G. Andrews
Anya (daughter of Lyubov Andreyevna)	Lois Hall
Varya (adopted daughter of Lyubov Andreyevna)	Katherine Emery
Lyubov Andreyevna (the owner of the Cherry Orchard)	Eva Le Gallienne
Leonid Andreyevitch (her brother)	Joseph Schildkraut
Charlotta Ivanovna (a governess)	Leona Roberts
Her Dog	Touche
Semyonov-Pistchik (a landowner)	Carl Benton Reid
Yasha (a young valet)	Stanley Phillips
Petya Trofimov (a student)	Eduard Franz
A Tramp	Bruce Adams
The Station Master	Michael Gray
A Post Office Clerk	Jack Lynds
Servants and Guests	Lois Holmes, Beatrice Manley, Annette Sorell, H. Etienne

Acting Mostly Admirable

Last nights' playing was in almost all cases admirable. Miss LeGallienne, as the lady of the cherry orchard, most artfully and touchingly managed the changes of mood of a wispy character. Mr. Schildkraut, as her talkative, simple-hearted and slightly batty brother, performed with effective restraint, and the two of them made the next-to-last moments of the drama as moving as they must be.

The casting of the other parts bespeaks intelligence most of the time. Stefan Schnabel makes an excellent Muscovite butter-and-egg man, and Katherine Emery plays the gentle, frustrated Varya as well, I think, as she could ever be played. It is surprising to find Rex O'Malley in a comedy makeup acting the clumsy Epihodov, for one might not have thought of him for this role; yet he does well by it.

Venerable A. G. Andrews, who has been acting since 1862, is an inspired choice for Firs, the ex-serf, and Eduard Franz, as the student, speaks persuadingly Chekhov's contemplations of human hopes. I did not care for Leona Roberts' Helen Westley version of the governess, for she is too broadly comic, and I was more annoyed by Stanley Phillips' Yasha than the playwright meant me to be.

The settings, by Motley, are not stunning, but they fit. They do not intrude upon the play.

BACK THE ATTACK
BUY THE
WAR BONDS TODAY

THE NEW YORK POST
January 26, 1944

Chekhov's 'The Cherry Orchard' Newly Produced at the National

By WILELLA WALDORF

AT the National Theatre some good actors are playing "The Cherry Orchard" for laughs, and the result is one of the saddest spectacles we have encountered in years of Broadway playgoing.

Oh yes, we know "The Cherry Orchard" is a comedy, in the stricter sense of the term, and that, contrary to general opinion, Chekhov never intended that his work should be construed as the dramatic equivalent of a funeral march.

But we were hardly prepared for the display of clumsy slapstick that went on last night in and about Mme. Ranevsky's heavily mortgaged estate.

How Eva LeGallienne and Margaret Webster, working together as directors, could have evolved this dismal travesty on a beautiful play, it is quite impossible for us to figure out.

Back in the twenties Miss LeGallienne herself staged an uncommonly effective production of the work at her Civic Repertory Theatre, which was repeated in 1933 uptown at the New Amsterdam. Alla Nazimova then acted the role Miss LeGallienne now performs, but it is not the absence of Nazimova that is bothering us.

A Disappointing Production

No one actor or actress can make, or ruin, a Chekhov production. His plays, to register at all, must be transmitted to the audience, not by a series of virtuoso performances, but with the integration and symphonic effect of an orchestra playing in unison under a brilliant conductor.

This Miss LeGallienne's earlier production achieved to a considerable degree. Last night we sometimes found it difficult to believe we were hearing the same play.

Only just before the final curtain fell, with that venerable actor, A. G. Andrews as Firs, alone upon the stage, did we feel any of its haunting beauty. Capable as some of the other performances are, the general effect is one of dissonance.

Miss LeGallienne, playing Mme. Ranevsky, and Joseph Schildkraut as her talkative brother, both have effective passages, but they are seldom in key because the production as a whole is distressingly off pitch. Much of the time they seemed merely to be acting, acting, acting, especially Mr. Schildkraut, who suffered more than Miss LeGallienne from the prevailing impression that Chekhov must not under any circumstances be permitted to become dull.

Low Comedy All Over the Place

Miss Webster, who is noted—and rightly—for her striking efforts to remove the classroom stigma from Shakespeare's plays, appears to have tried to apply a similar treatment to "The Cherry Orchard" and flunked the course.

Rex O'Malley as Epihodov was so grotesquely made up and equipped with so many foolish gags that we kept wondering why they didn't hire Bobby Clark and turn the thing into a riot then and there. Leona Roberts is playing the same part she acted in the Civic Repertory production, but we don't recall that she ever went so far for laughs as she did last night. Stanley Phillips as Yasha reminded us of a fresh bus-boy in a cheap Broadway night spot.

Stefan Schnabel as Lopahin looked the part and occasionally played it, but he is an actor inclined to overdo, and he has a disconcerting habit of staring at the audience as if about to utter an aside in the best Boucicault tradition.

Out of this medley occasionally came a strain that fell pleasantly on the ear. Miss LeGallienne had her moments. So, too, did Mr. Schildkraut, when not trying to outmug the comedians. Katherine Emery and Lois Hall as the daughters were generally acceptable. Virginia Campbell was a help and Eduard Franz came through well as Petya, the perennial student. A. G. Andrews was the best of the lot.

But Still, It's Not a Girlie Show

Possibly we are all wrong about this and Miss LeGallienne and Miss Webster are right. They are putting on Chekhov for Broadway now, with a set of backers and all the fixings. Apparently they feel that this approach is the proper one.

All we can say is that the people seated directly behind us didn't like it any better than we did, for somewhat different reasons. "I thought this was going to be a girlie show!" one of them kept saying over and over.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
January 26, 1944

The Fruit Is Sweet

By HOWARD BARNES

A distinguished production of a classic is always a theatrical event. Particularly happy is that which occurred at the National Theater last night, where "The Cherry Orchard" was revived. The Chekov comedy may seem a trifle remote in these days of immediate and terrible tension. The meticulous elegance of the offering has a way of becoming a bit mannered at times. The fact remains that Margaret Webster, Eva Le Gallienne, Joseph Schildkraut and a brilliantly aware supporting company have realized the depth and beauty of a great play at every turn. The stage does itself proud with such a show as this; playgoers are privileged to witness it.

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Miss Le Gallienne has played and directed Chekhov dramas before. Never has she been so radiantly assured, so eloquent and moving. Her Lyubov Andreyevna is a figure of such stature and meaning that you will have to turn to another revival of a classic to find its like. Together with the gifted Miss Webster she has contrived an artful and tremendously satisfying rendition of the work, full of small, significant movement, yet always focused squarely on the tragi-comic thema of its author. Their collaborators have seen to it that "The Cherry Orchard" is, in every sense, a labor of devotion as well as superior craftsmanship.

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They have had something with which to work. For the drama, although written nearly half a century ago about the fin du siecle of a decadent Russian society, has substance and structure. Its illumination of human experience is universal and abiding. For a world in the latter throes of a profound upheaval, which laps well over into the period of the play, it is a profound and pertinent commentary on mortal existence. The reckless gayety and brooding defeatism of the people who live in the cherry orchard, the apologetic ruthlessness with which the son of a serf chops it down even as the former owners are departing and the whole range of relationships which bind the action together would have withstood a mediocre revival.

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As it is, each facet of the drama is revealed in its full splendor. The return of Lyubov Andreyevna to her provincial manor is a brilliant bit of stage magic. The final ball, when she learns that the house and orchard are doomed, is superbly executed. Schildkraut, as the ne'er-do-well brother, is remarkably restrained and effective. Stefan Schnabel is excellent as the newly rich kulak who buys the place to which he had been denied admittance as a youth. Then there are A. G. Andrews, giving a moving portrayal of an old servitor; Leona Roberts, who is comically splendid as a gay old governess; Katherine Emery and Lois Hall, as the contrasting daughters of the household; Carl Benton Reid, Eduard Franz and others to give the revival a rich texture of acting. Miss Webster's directorial hand is apparent always and the Motley designs are magnificently right. "The Cherry Orchard" is a grateful addition to the season.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
January 26, 1944

Margaret Webster Finds The True Anton Chekhov

By BURTON RASCOE

MARGARET WEBSTER, who achieved a dramatic miracle with her production of Othello, has scored her second great triumph this season with her interpretation of The Cherry Orchard, which she (and, so the program says, Carly Wharton) revived last night at the National.

"Revived," did I say? . . . What an invidious ineptitude that word is when applied to the operation Miss Webster has performed upon the aging and infirm body of the Chekhov classic as we have known it. She has not merely given it a shot of adrenalin and stood it shakily on its feet; she has given it vibrant new life, vitality and spirit.

Le Gallienne Shares Honors

She has made it a "must" on the list of plays you should see this season, especially if you have seen other versions or are acquainted only with the Constance Garnet translation and have wondered why anyone ever called that thing a drama, much less one of the greatest of modern times. Miss Webster has made it an entertainment of the first order—witty, comical, satirical, pathetic, realistic and funny, very like life in any country at any time, and not a depressing, symbolical study in Russian futility and pessimism—as it has been described by the pontificators and as it has been played before.

Of course, I am aware that Eva Le Gallienne shares credit with Miss Webster on the playbill for staging this version of The Cherry Orchard; but that only means that Miss Webster has taken her basic material from Miss Le Gallienne's revival of the play in 1933 and given it what, for want of a better phrase, might be called the Webster touch—which means she has recreated it, using the Irina Skariatina translation as her text, starring Miss Le Gallienne (together with Joseph Schildkraut) and casting the marvelous Leona Roberts in the principal comic role, which Miss Roberts played in Miss Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory company.

Miss Webster's triumph is that, with this production, she has blasted higher than a kite the "profound, philosophical" commentaries of the literary embalmers of Chekhov and their analysis of the "symbols and meanings" of The Cherry Orchard and has presented it as what I have no doubt Chekhov meant it to be—a shrewdly constructed lively theatrical entertainment.

Of course, if your mind runs that way, you can have fun deducing that The Cherry Orchard is symbolical of the economic and social changes which took place in Russia between the time of the emancipation of the serfs to the rise of the bourgeoise coincident with the rise of industrialism. Or with finding, in the character of Petya, a symbol of the frustration of the intellectuals in the futility of the Nihilist movement, and so on, and so on. But, simply viewed as it may be viewed in this production, The Cherry Orchard is the tragi-comedy of life, caught in some quintessentials by fine dramatic art.

The cast, as is usual, when Miss Webster gets really to work on one, is superb, specifically and generally, the highest honors (as I see them) probably going, not to the stars, but to the lovely Katherine Emery for her heart-breaking performance as Varya; to Miss Roberts, who scored laughs with every appearance; to Carl Benton Reid, for a moving job as Semyonov; to Eduard Franz as the futilitarian, and to A. G. Andrews as the aged Firs.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
January 26, 1944

'Cherry Orchard' Revived at National

By ROBERT GARLAND

TODAY'S news from the Broadway sector is good. It's better than good. It's excellent. Eva Le Gallienne's latest revival of Anton Chekhov's compassionate tragic-comedy, "The Cherry Orchard," is at the same time her greatest. In a fresh and fluent adaptation by Irina Skariatina, she and Margaret Webster, another lady who knows her way around the theatre, have staged it with affection, admiration and almost unflagging skill.

I say "with almost unflagging skill" because, in an understandable effort to cheer up "The Cherry Orchard," they have occasionally gone too far. In the resuscitation at the National, there're times when the action is just too funny for the words. Under the title of his masterpiece, Chekhov wrote "comedy," not farce.

Here in America, especially here in New York, "The Cherry Orchard" quite rightly belongs to Miss Le Gallienne. Especially when done in English. It is she who, against almost everybody's better judgment, set it up on the stage of her gone-but-not-forgotten Civic Repertory Theatre, along with the same author's "The Three Sisters" and "The Sea Gull." It was she who last revived it at the New Amsterdam, along about 1933. It's her's all right!

These showtimes in 41st st., the dizzy denizens of Lyubov Andreyevna's fated fruit-patch seem less dizzy than they did in the somewhat heavy-footed translation credited by Miss LeGallienne to Constance Garnett down in 14th st. Thanks to Miss Skariatina, the new adaptor, they may be crazy, but they ain't no fools. Now, they're crazy like a fox, rather than crazy like a nit-wit.

But the fateful undercurrents stirring constantly beneath the story of the old Russian family, the ancient mansion and the doomed cherry orchard which is symbolic of them all, remain the same. It is, fundamentally, one of the most heart-breaking and most skillfully contrived "comedies" in the modern theatre.

That is why I am hurt to see it jazzed up, streamlined, or what you will, especially in the first part of the third act, that section of the play in which the ball is going on and both the family and the guests are waiting for Leonid Andreyevitch to return from town with news that the cherry orchard has either been sold or saved. Last night, at the National, this really did distress me.

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Lost and Lonely . . .

But let's brand it as a quibble, going on to report with what beautiful assurance Eva Le Gallienne plays the role of Lyubov Andreyevna, the owner of the cherry orchard; a role, which, when Miss Le Gallienne was holding forth south of the Macy-Gimbel Line, was entrusted to Alla Nazimova. Her's is a lost and lonely lady-on-the-downgrade and one of the major performances in town. Please don't miss it.

An artfully selected cast gives Miss Le Gallienne all the assistance she could possibly demand. Joseph Schildkraut is at his Schildkrautian peak as Leonid Andreyevitch, the brother of the Lady of the Orchard, giving her the same admirable lift he gave her in "Liliom," "Camille," "Romeo and Juliet," "Uncle Harry" and, remember it or not, as the Duchess in "Alice in Wonderland."

Rex O'Malley is excellent in a role in which I like to see him. Katherine Emery is his equal as Varya. Leona Roberts may be a bit too comic as the governess who is always up to tricks. And there's a dog, a tiny dog, with a fine feeling for the footlights. Its name is Touche . . . This most recent revival of "The Cherry Orchard," played against righter than right backgrounds by Motley, is out of the showshop's upper drawer. Just forget about that quibble!

THE NEW YORK SUN
January 26, 1944

'The Cherry Orchard,' One of the Drama's Classics, Presented at National

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THEY are again chopping down Mme. Ranevsky's cherished trees in "The Cherry Orchard," which was restored to the New York stage last night at the National. This last play by Anton Pavlovitch Chekhov (1860-1904), first produced in America by the Muscovites of Stanislavsky, is now beautifully acted by the LeGallienne-Schildkraut company and is, indeed, a rare contribution to the local theatrical season.

Chekhov's study of Russia's changing social order has had several presentations in this city since it was introduced to us in the early Twenties by the Moscow Art Theater. Its principal role has been done by both Miss Le Gallienne and Mme. Nazimova. Now along comes this new production under the sponsorship of Carly Wharton and the busy and brilliant Margaret Webster.

Chekhov, as our playgoers have come to know him, is a spokesman for the little people. He writes of them with great sympathy and understanding. In "The Cherry Orchard," as in other works, he is concerned with their frailities and futilities, their bewilderments and awkward yearnings. There is generally a gleam of comedy in their sadness; his people have laughter along with their sufferings.

"The Cherry Orchard" is now, and always has been, a play of inaction. It is crowded with pauses, sighs, chuckles and irrelevancies. There is incessant prattling by minor characters. There is somberness, sadness, gayety and horseplay. It is still the story of a mortgage, with the grounds and beautiful trees of the proud landowners going for sale at public auction to pay off their debts. Their estate gone, and sold to the boorish son of a peasant who has come along in industry, the family of Mme. Ranevsky—she is known as Lyubov Andreyevna in the present translation—depart to take up their lives anew, leaving the old and forgotten Firs to die alone as the axes of the woodsmen are thudding ironically against the cherished trees.

The new production at the National evokes some fine performances. It's my impression that Miss LeGallienne does a brilliant job as the sentimental, impractical, effortless, great-hearted woman who loved her trees, her land, her home. There are moments when this actress bears an almost startling resemblance to the late and great Emily Stevens, as Miss Stevens was when she did Hedda Gabler. Joseph Schildkraut gives one of his finest characterizations as her brother, now called Leonid Andreyevitch.

You'll like others, too. Certainly the performances of Carl Benton Reid, Katherine Emery, Rex O'Malley and Stefan Schnabel as Lopahin, whose father was a serf, but who has himself become a representative of the new order. The role of the aged man-servant, Firs, falls to A. G. Andrews, now in his eighties, but going along valiantly as Equity's oldest practicing member.

Chekhov has, undoubtedly, influenced the writings of dramatists from George Bernard Shaw to Rose Franken. And from the cast of Miss Franken's recent "Outrageous Fortune" now steps Eduard Franz to give a moving and believable portrayal of the character of Petya Trofimov, the student. Getting along in years he is, but still a student.

THE NEW YORK TIMES
January 26, 1944

Eva LeGallienne and Joseph Schildkraut Are Starred in a Revival of 'Cherry Orchard' at the National Theatre

By LEWIS NICHOLS

MARGARET WEBSTER, for years the right hand of the Bard of Broadway, now has turned her attention to Chekhov, and last evening in association with Carly Wharton offered an excellent production of "The Cherry Orchard." Since Miss Webster combined with Eva Le Gallienne to direct it, and the latter and Joseph Schildkraut are playing the leading roles, the National Theatre's contribution to the library of the later classics is setting up a mark which for some time may be hard to better. For Chekhov's play about a defeated age in Russia, with its prophesy for the news, is well acted and well directed and is produced with the utmost taste.

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"The Cherry Orchard" is not a play for the amateur, though he often tries it and comes to no good. The drama is static, nothing happens. A family returns to the ancestral estate, cannot afford to pay the debts and is forced to leave—after four acts of talking about it. The characters all are defeated and wavering; only one of them looks forward, and he is not too certain he will reach what he sees. In poor hands the figures well can remain soft puppets and the play can become one of literature's more boring two hours.But not under the hands of the Misses Webster and LeGallienne, who credit Chekhov with having written about real people.

Miss LeGallienne — who happens to have given the last previous revival in 1933, when the dream of the Civic Repertory Theatre was fading—plays Lyubov, the owner of the cherry orchard, and Mr. Schildkraut is Leonid, the brother. Miss LeGallienne does her role youthfully; her partner makes of him a man who is a little dull, a little pompous and one completely uncertain about how he can face the world. If there can be any complaint about the LeGallienne-Schildkraut family heads, it is that, especially toward the end of the play, they give their roles a touch of chin-up heroics. Not for long, however.

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Stefan Schnabel is Lopahin, a peasant's son who has made money, lacks the courage to tell his sweetheart of his love and finally, after trying to save the estate for its owners, buys it himself. Lopahin used many gestures; Mr. Schnabel uses many—whether too many depends on the point of view. Lois Hall is a pretty daughter, Anya; Katherine Emery is Varya, and Eduard Franz is excellent as the student to whom fall many of the best speeches of "The Cherry Orchard." And finally, and by way of a climax, the part of Firs, the old servant, is played magnificently by A. G. Andrews. Mr. Andrews has been on the stage since 1862, a period which would include a good many opening nights; the most recent one he held completely by a most moving performance.

In putting on the revival of their choice, the ladies have spared no attention to detail. There is a new translation by Irina Skariatina, which comes fluidly over the footlights; and Miss Webster and Miss Le Gallienne have directed the play so as to bring out what action there is and to make the talk conversational. Having been brought up not to fear Shakespeare, Miss Webster has none of Chekhov. The costumes and scenery by Motley also are good, and are done in taste and with style.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
January 26, 1944

Chekhov Returns to Broadway

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

ANY revival of *The Cherry Orchard* is, of course, an event, Chekhov's last and, as most people would have it, greatest play, embalming as it does a feckless, charming leisure class is itself embalmed in our memories. Yet a little more last night than when I saw it with Nazimova years ago it did not quite communicate or fullfill itself. Too often one waited for something that did not come, or snatched at something that was not there.

The answer, I think, lies in play and production alike. Though *The Cherry Orchard* has the most fragrance of any of Chekhov's works I must confess to finding it unsubstantial. To endow it with dimensions, we must somehow keep remembering, rather than spontaneously perceive, that these rather foolish people symbolize a class. I don't mean to take a phillistine point of view, or seem to miss the point of the play. But if I still find these people touching, I find them less interesting than formerly. Their simplicity is not complex enough; they have too few turns and gestures. The people of *The Three Sisters* seem to me more moving and real, because the impotence of their wills spells the death of their desires. But the desires are at least there; as well as the drama, however negative. *The Cherry Orchard*, by comparison, seems to treat of children. And the fact that they are symbolic children is still not quite enough.

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All this is based, of course, on one's impressions of the play as produced in English. The present production has its good points and its good people, and ought to be seen by anyone with a serious interest in the theater. But it is by no means highly satisfactory. Performing *The Cherry Orchard* is like carving a bird without joints. There is little to seize on; the whole thing calls for fusion rather than emphasis. Among other things, the comedy and pathos should inter-penetrate. Last night they often did not. Too much of the comedy was pointed up; too many of the roles were turned into mere character parts. Some of the serious moments—notably Lopahin's when he exults over buying the property—struck the wrong note. The third act, as Nazimova played it, seemed to me intensely poignant; last night I only felt that it should be.

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As Mme. Ranevsky, Eva Le Gallienne shows deftness and intelligence, but somehow lacks temperament. Mr. Schildkraut plays the brother as a straight comedy figure (which he probably is) though with restraint. Stefan Schnabel's Lopahin suffers from the fact that he never seems a man of peasant birth. Eduard Franz, Katherine Emery, Rex O'Malley and Carl Benton Reid offer agreeable performances. Lois Hall is appealing as the young daughter; as Yasha, Stanley Phillips gets across the flip vulgarity of a squab valet; and as old Firs, A. G. Andrews, celebrating his 82d year in the theater, performed winningly. Motley's sets and costumes are charming.

"The Duke in Darkness"

Play by Patrick Hamilton; staging by Robert Henderson and settings by Stewart Chaney. Presented by Alexander H. Cohen and Joseph Kipness at the Playhouse Theatre, January 24, 1944.

THE NEW YORK SUN
January 25, 1944

'The Duke in Darkness,' Cloak and Dagger Melodrama, Opens at Playhouse

By WARD MOREHOUSE

PATRICK HAMILTON, the English dramatist who devised such compact and tingling thrillers in "Angel Street" and "Rope's End," has not done the trick with his latest play, "The Duke in Darkness." This piece, seen in London's West End two years ago, had its first New York presentation last night at the Playhouse.

Here is a cloak and dagger melodrama, old-fashioned heroics and theatrical grandeur of the school of "When Knighthood Was in Flower." It is melodrama well acted and handsomely produced, and there are moments when you watch it fascinatedly, but never in any of these moments does it give you the feeling that you're seeing a good play.

"The Duke in Darkness," done with an all-male cast, and placed upon the stage of Mr. Brady's Playhouse by the youthful Alexander Cohen and the not so doddering Joseph Kipness, is a fable of the French civil wars, sixteenth century. For fifteen years the Duke of Laterraine and his ex-clerk, Gribaud, have been imprisoned in a remote castle. During all this period the Duke has never ceased plotting and planning his escape. He has fashioned a crude rope, thirty feet in length. He has clawed and chipped and burrowed a huge hole through the chateau's thick walls. He has feigned blindness for five years and he has never given up hope. But his humble fellow prisoner has broken under the ordeal and is gradually losing his mind.

Playwright Hamilton, in the course of his three acts, shows how the noble Duke, given the aid of a resourceful ally, a man of his own people, outwits his captors and effects an escape, even though the murder of his friend, the poor Gribaud, now hopelessly mad, becomes a necessary and merciful step.

THE CAST

Gribaud	Edgar Stehli
The Duke of Laterraine	Philip Merivale
Voulain	Raymond Burr
Chauvet	Horace Cooper
Marteau	Wells Richardson
The Duke of Lamorre	Louis Hector
The Count D'Aublaye	Albert Carroll
Guards	Dorman Leonard, Ralph Douglas, Joseph Vernay

In both "Angel Street" and "Rope's End" Mr. Hamilton proved himself a master of suspense, but there is little or none of it in "The Duke in Darkness." This new play, which is all too nicely pat at the finish, never really approaches the standard of that masterful piece current at the Golden Theater or the chiller which Ernest Milton and his superb co-workers did in this town about a dozen years ago.

Aside from Mr. Hamilton's own shortcomings in this instance, it might also be noted that all-male drama has seldom been a felicitous experiment in the New York theater. Many seasons ago there was an interesting but shortlived piece called "The New Sin." And in 1930 along came the magnificant "Journey's End." But the majority of the others have had scant success.

"The Duke in Darkness" is valiantly performed by such people as Philip Merivale, Louis Hector and Raymond Burr. Mr. Merivale acts with his usual skill, taste and Mansfieldian grace. Louis Hector provides excitement as his arch enemy, the Duke of Lamorre. There is plenty of fire in the playing of Mr. Burr as the plotting Voulain. Edgar Stehli, who has done some fine work in Broadway productions — remember "The Greatest Show on Earth"! — has the part of the wretched fellow who cracks up, and Albert Carroll, an actor some have been watching since those wonderful "Grand Street Follies" days, returns in the raiment of the diabolical Count D'Aublaye.

There's flourish, and bravado, in "The Duke in Darkness." Scenery and actors, too. But never enough of a play.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
January 25, 1944

'The Duke in Darkness' Misses As a Sword-and-Goblet Meller

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Egad.
Zounds.
Gadzooks.
Damme.
And, regretfully, Oh, nuts!

PATRICK HAMILTON, who wrote the superb "Angel Street," has fashioned a sword, cape and poison melodrama called "The Duke in Darkness," which was presented at the Playhouse last night in a wonderful setting and with a splendid cast.

I wanted to like it, because I'm a regular simp about extravagant drama and believe there should be more of it in the theatre. I finished the evening being less than crazy about it, much as I admired the individual performances of everybody in the cast. The trouble was that I didn't care whether Philip Merivale escaped or not—and if once you don't care, "The Duke in Darkness" has no meaning.

Long-Time Prisoner

I never saw Eugene O'Neill's pa as the Count of Monte Cristo, but from what I have read he may have been something like Mr. Merivale. This Merivale, handsome, brooding, dashing and well-spoken, is quite a figure for a horse opera about Sixteenth Century France, before horses were invented.

He's a duke, and for fifteen years he has been the prisoner of another duke in the beautiful Chateau Lamorre, whose arched ceiling and lovely vista were designed by Stewart Chaney. With this duke—Merivale, I mean—is Edgar Stehli, a loving manservant who has finally gone stir-crazy.

The problem of the melodrama is how to get the duke and his attendant out of the other

duke's dukery. This involves a certain amount of pleasant suspense and trickery. For one thing, Mr. Merivale pretends to his captors that he is blind—pretends so well that he doesn't budge when Albert Carroll jabs a red-hot poker at his eye. For another thing, Mr. Stehli is so far gone in the head that in the end it is simpler to kill him off with poison from a red goblet—a job his loving master does with sadness in his soul—rather than to let him climb down a homemade rope or just bust out of the joint.

Remember Raymond Burr

But, as I say, I didn't much care whether anybody escaped or not. Aside from pointing out that 15 years in any one place, even Hedy Lamarr's lap, could be irksome to anybody, Playwright Hamilton fails to persuade one of the necessity for Mr. Merivale's liberty.

The production is excellent. Mr. Chaney's setting is a perfect background for swords, cloaks, knaves and red goblets. Merivale is imperious, romantic and clever at pretending to be blind. Louis Hector radiates an imposing Sixteenth Century malevolence as the other duke, and I heartily recommend for further use in the theatre one Raymond Burr, who plays a friendly plotter with physical charm and dramatic intensity.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

January 25, 1944

Boring Balderdash

By HOWARD BARNES

A LUGUBRIOUS costume melodrama has come to the Playhouse. "The Duke in Darkness" celebrates the sad lot of an imprisoned French nobleman during the civil wars of the 16th century and the sadder lot of his daft henchman. For all its sword-rattling, cloak-swishing and cross references to medieval terror, it inspires a modicum of sympathy or sustained interest. Although Patrick Hamilton, whose "Angel Street" has been something of a boon to Broadway, is the author of the charade, and Philip Merivale plays the starring role with mournful intensity, it is a dull, windy and meaningless show. High-school youngsters are supposed to write plays such as this. One does not expect to find them on Broadway.

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Word had trickled through from London where the offering was first presented that it wasn't much shakes as a straight shocker or a psychological thriller. None of the reports as I remember, made clear how utterly lacking it was in dramatic imagination or vitality. There is a hot poker scene in "The Duke in Darkness"; there are random ravings by a lout who wants to feel rain on his face once more and there is a particularly disagreeable interlude in which a perfumed count slaps the duke's wrist. They are the high points of a singularly dreary drama. Even so, they rate red ink in the ledger of the latest stage exhibit.

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Hamilton is no novice at melodrama. Not only in "Angel Street," but in the memorable "Rope's End," he contrived compounds of physical and psychological violence which were vastly entertaining. He had an off-day when he composed this work. The duke is the sort of fellow who claims to be a champion of the people, but gives his old friend in captivity a big slug of poison when he is about to make a getaway. The loyal servitor takes an unconscionable time dying and the villian of the piece never emerges as a recognizable figure, in whatever age he may have waved red-hot pokers around his victim's head. For most of the time, the play sags under a burden of loquacious nonsense. When characters are not talking endlessly, they are left to scurry around a dank castle without any dialogue at all.

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Merivale is better at scurrying than talking in "The Duke in Darkness." He fakes blindness so emphatically that even a small child would not be fooled by the ruse. He climbs in and out of hidden crypts, kisses ducal flags and fences with imaginary enemies. The show gives him little support, but he does nothing to remedy a bad script. Edgar Stehli, as the mad man servant and Louis Hector, as the cruel captor of the duke, do what they can to whip up a bit of excitement in the proceedings, but it amounts to very little. The Stewart Chaney setting is quite adequate. Any backdrop would be adequate for the boring balderdash of "The Duke in Darkness."

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

January 25, 1944

Philip Merivale Back on Broadway in Play of French Civil War

By ROBERT GARLAND

AN odd, but curiously fascinating, melodrama has happily restored Philip Merivale to the Broadway stage. He has been absent for too long a while. With an all-male cast that could scarcely be bettered, it is at the Playhouse. Known as "The Duke in Darkness," it is also Patrick Hamilton's second thriller on the current scene. The first, "Angel Street," is now well into its third season at the Golden, as all good playgoers know.

Mr. Hamilton goes in for hair-raisers in a biggish way, for he is also the author of "Rope," produced here on Manhattan by Lee Shubert as "Rope's End," and such scary novels as "The Midnight Bell," "The Seige of Pleasure," "The Plains of Cement" and "Hangover Square" which, at the very moment, he is dramatizing for Alexander Cohen, who had a hand in bringing last night's offering to town.

There are times, it must be admitted, when you're not altogether sure what "The Duke in Darkness" is all about; where its characters come from, or for that matter, where they're going. That, to my way of thinking, is one of the fascinating things to be found in William A. Brady's charming little theatre. Against one of Stewart Chaney's most Chaneyish backgrounds, eerily directed by Robert Henderson, there is a strange unreality about it.

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Cat and Mouse

The dusky action of "The Duke in Darkness" takes place in the Chateau Lamorre, in France, at the time of the Civil Wars—1580, thanks to a helpful program! The Duke of Lamorre, played by Louis Hector, has the Duke of Laterraine in his custody. The Duke of Laterraine is the happily returned Mr. Merivale. With his servant, he has been a prisoner for all of 15 years, confined in a high room overlooking a lonely valley.

The Duke of Laterraine pretends to have lost his eyesight, while the servant has actually lost his mind. Meanwhile, in the outside world of Sixteenth Century France, conditions have been changing. His suporters want the banished Duke of Laterraine back again. The Duke of Lamorre has been losing power and prestige, estranging himself from his people and his king. He fears the man he is holding prisoner.

He decides to do away with his rival. Returning to the Chateau Lamorre, he plays a cat-and-mouse game with his victim in an effort to find out if he actually is blind. It is a scene both remote and real, played to the hilt by Mr. Merivale and Mr. Hector, as well as by Edgar Stehli, who is the feeble-minded servant. In its fascinating—there's that word again!—way, it is uncanny, gruesome and something to sit through.

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Something Different

This "The Duke in Darkness" is a play about which it is difficult to write. The story is confused. The background is frequently in shadow. And, when the final curtain falls, many a question is left unanswered. In its dialogue, it is repetitious. But nevertheless and notwithstanding, there are moments—not too few of them, either—when it holds you strongly, as if against your will. And, as you must have gathered, it is acted and produced most skillfully.

Not since his performance in "Cynara," which I found even more to my admiration than even "Death Takes a Holiday," which made him a star, has Philip Merivale been more assured, more effective as an actor. If the Duke of Laterraine is not always as credible, as fully motivated as he might be, the fault is not his. Maybe the Duke is meant to be blurred. Always a little out of focus.

Edgar Stehli, the original Dr. Einstein in "Arsenic and Old Lace," has another trying role as the feeble-minded servant. Louis Hector is impressively sadistic as the Duke of Lamorre. And, making his first New York appearance in a dramatic role, is a large and likable newcomer known as Raymond Burr. Out of Canada by way of India, he comes to Broadway by way of the Pasadena Playhouse.

This "The Duke in Darkness" is certainly something different in the theatre. I wonder if I dare use "fascinating" once more?

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM

January 25, 1944

Dukes Should Be Livelier

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

HAVING written two such thrillers as *Rope's End* and *Angel Street*, Patrick Hamilton can be forgiven much. Let us, therefore, freely forgive him *The Duke in Darkness*, a cloak-and-sword offering laid in France in 1580, and frequently suggesting the theater technique of that era. Just what bit Mr. Hamilton I cannot say; perhaps he has a liking for dukes. If so, he is not the first writer whose wits have been addled by high society.

His costume piece is concerned with a duke —presumably an adherent of the great Henry of Navarre, he of the oriflamme and the "Paris is well worth a mass"—who for 15 years has been imprisoned with his servant high up in an enemy duke's chateau. Though the servant has abandoned hope and in fact gone plumb nuts, not so the duke. He has feigned blindness, woven ropes and dug holes in the wall, knowing that deliverance will come.

For two acts, while deliverance is merely on its way, the duke plays chess with his potty retainer, quiets that character's outbursts, endures the taunts of his captor, and hears from a keeper who is really his rescuer just how he shall escape. Comes the third act, and the great plan is put into effect. On the stage of the Playhouse last night I am bound to say that it worked. But for all that, I do not recommend this plan either to gentlemen who find themselves cooped up in chateaus, or to playwrights who wish their audiences to speak well of their plays. Mr. Hamilton's plan of deliverance would not fool a half-wit, and it would not excite a child.

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Since the rest of the play is merely a tame prelude to the last act, and the last act is absurd, *The Duke in Darkness* has very little to offer. It lacks ingenuity, atmosphere, suspense —qualities that Mr. Hamilton has been a master of in the past—without the slightest compensation in the way of character drawing

or dialogue. It is simply old-fashioned melodrama with very little melodrama. I must confess that I wasn't bored, but I was never once excited, and I'm afraid it was the sheer ineptness of the last act, rather than anything worthier, that kept me listening. I think you can safely skip Mr. Hamilton's effort.

The cast played with appropriate lack of subtlety. As the Duke, Philip Merivale was suitably valiant and manly. As the retainer, Edgar Stehli went mad very nicely; as the bad Duke, Louis Hector was unmistakably villainous; and as the rescuer, Raymond Burr was pleasantly forthright.

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The Art of Melodrama Comes a Croppr at the Playhouse and in 'The Duke in Darkness'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

PATRICK HAMILTON is an expert at probing into the peculiarities of the human mind, as witness "Angel Street," which has been running since early in the last century; "Rope's End" and the novel "Hangover Square." Patrick Hamilton, like every other playwright, can stub his toe, however, and this he has done most thoroughly in "The Duke in Darkness," which opened last evening at the Playhouse. As melodrama of either character or action it is dull, and as literature it sounds quite often like a parody nationally circulated magazines pay real money to acquire. As serious theatre—put away the thought.

Mr. Hamilton is celebrating the flight from prison of a Good Duke who had been locked up fifteen years before by a Bad Duke, presumably because the G. D. had been interested in the welfare of the people. As he sat in the castle room after the escape, the B. D. was pretty mournful. "There was a red ring around the moon tonight," he muttered, and then repeated it once or twice, so the message about fate would not be lost on the audience. It may have been this red ring which caused him to talk so foolishly, but whatever—he did, indeed. The Good Duke already was out of there, and if the audience laughed a little, that appeared under the circumstances to be quite in order. A melodrama falling over into parody can be quite funny in a sad way.

Although he usually writes clipped, precise bits of dialogue, Mr. Hamilton, in "The Duke in Darkness," has fallen into grevious ways. The conversation is florid and repetitious, failing to fool anyone into thinking much action goes forward on the stage. Everything is placed just right in shades of black and white. The Good Duke is all good, or as good as human ingenuity—and Mr. Hamilton has a deal of that—can make him; and the bad one is foul, to use the only possible adjective. The third leading character, that of the secretary who shares the imprisonment and goes mad in the process, also is good, as befits the companion of a Good Duke. They all are very pat.

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The acting doesn't do a great deal to help Mr. Hamilton over this, his roughest local hurdle. Philip Merivale plays the imprisoned man, doing so with gestures and looking at the end a bit like the pictures of Washington crossing the Delaware. Edgar Stehli is the little secretary, and obviously is having an actor's holiday, running through the chapters on loyalty, friendship, humility, madness and, finally, death. Louis Hector, in fine costume, roars the part of the duke who looked on the red of the moon and found it not to his liking. In staging the play, Robert Henderson has permitted it to become ridiculous at times; the scenery by Stewart Chaney is worthy of a better occupant.

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The Duke in Darkness Lacks Theater Appeal

By BURTON RASCOE

PATRICK HAMILTON'S new play, The Duke in Darkness, which opened at the Playhouse last night, will read better, when it appears in book form, than it can ever be enacted.

For it is doubtful whether it can ever be given a better production than the Messrs. Cohen and Kipness have given it; or that any company of actors can ever get more out of it than do the Messrs. Merivale, Stehli, Hector, Burr and their co-workers. Last night they held us tensely, respectfully, hushfully interested (at least until the last five minutes of the play) but never were they able to thrill me.

That is because the drama is far more literary than theatrical. The words are marvelously cadenced; the sentences are carefully pointed and rarely without their artistically magical element of surprise (reminding one, at times, of Dryden and then again of Rostand); the theme is consistently developed, within its bizaare framework, with delightful literary touches of subacid irony. Even the last five minutes, which were rather hard to take, presented an entirely logical conclusion, if you accept the original premise.

The fine elements of this drama could readily be appreciated with the mind's eye, if it were read as a book; for, when you read a very literary play, you create your own pictures. But literary illusion, especially in cloak and sword melodrama, is extremely difficult to sustain on the stage. You become too aware of actors in costume and of props and the theatrical devices of illusion.

For instance last night, what was meant to be one great, terrifying, suspense scene of the play was that in which the Duke of Lamorre, in order to test whether the imprisoned Duke of Laterraine has been shamming blindness for 15 years or is actually blind, has a poker heated red hot and, with great deliberation, brings its awful end within a fraction of an inch of, first the left eye, and then the right eye, of his victim. Meanwhile the Duke of Laterraine keeps staring ahead and talking as though unaware of what has taken place—for he has practiced the art of feigning blindness for 15 years and, besides, his nerves are of steel, for he is a true son of "the kings who in a thousand years made France."

Now, if you read that in a book it would most likely seem very real to you. But when you see it on the stage you know damn well that the end of the poker has been painted red and that Louis Hector is not going to scorch Mr. Merivale's eyebrows, let alone cause him to give himself away. And so all you think is: "What a marvelous job Philip Merivale is doing—keeping his eyes staring like that without blinking!" . . . And so on through other scenes, intended to keep your hair on end, you are merely interested and full of admiration for the work of the actors —not partaking of an illusion.

The play is by the author of Angel Street and Rope's End, two fabulous successes. It tells of one French duke who was captured and shut up in the tower of the chateau of another duke during the 30-year civil war among the factions contending for the crown of France after the death of Henry II. Why he is thus imprisoned and not murdered is never made clear. But he has faith that he will some day escape and rejoin the people as an ally of Henry of Navarre. And eventually, he does—after his guard proves he is secretly his ally, after his faithful servant has gone mad, and after he has been exquisitely tortured by his captor.

Three actors besides Mr. Merivale have swell parts—long speeches and chances to display grand histrionics—Mr. Stehli, Mr. Burr and Mr. Hector; and they do them up brown, especially Mr. Stehli in his mad scenes. But histrionics—are hardly enough to carry a three-act play which has no women in it, is literary and is about the quarrels of two fictitious 16th century nobles.

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'The Duke in Darkness' a New and Suspenseful Thriller at the Playhouse

By WILELLA WALDORF

PATRICK HAMILTON, who specializes in literate thrillers, has gone back to the French Civil Wars of the sixteenth century for his latest play, "The Duke in Darkness," produced last night at the Playhouse. Fundamentally it is nothing more than a cape-and-sword melodrama involving a noble Duke who has been imprisoned for fifteen years in the chateau of an enemy, but who has never given up hope that he will some day escape and again take up arms as a champion of the "common people."

But Mr. Hamilton, who is the author of "Rope's End" and also of the current "Angel Street," manages to make something more than usually interesting out of an ordinary "escape" plot. Not only is he a master of suspense in the theatre, but his writing has more quality than is generally found in period plays of this school.

Since the three acts all take place in the room atop the chateau where the Duke and Gribaud, his erstwhile secretary, are imprisoned, there is no conceivable reason for introducing ladies into the play. Sabatini would have done so, and so would Hollywood, but not Patrick Hamilton. His cast of characters calls for no women, and there is accordingly not a shred of love interest.

Philip Merivale as An Imprisoned Nobleman

There is, however, almost continuous suspense, plus moments of genuine excitement. The less said about the actual plot the better, since a good deal depends on its audience knowing as little as possible about what does transpire.

The production is good. Stewart Chaney's setting is atmospheric and pictorially in the mood, and his costumes are effective. Robert Henderson has directed intelligently, if sometimes a bit self-consciously, and the acting company is headed by Philip Merivale, whose cadaverous look and gentlemanly demeanor well become the incarcerated Duke. His Grace pretends to be blind whenever any of his jailers appears, and Mr. Merivale carries this off very convincingly.

Edgar Stehli is excellent as Gribaud, the servant-secretary who loses his mind and thus becomes a decided liability to the escape plan, and the enemy Duke who comes, slightly tipsy, to visit his prisoners, is rousingly played by Louis Hector. Raymond Burr as the brains of the escape movement impressed us favorably and Albert Carroll made a good deal out of very little as the exquisite but sinister Count D'Aublaye.

"The Duke in Darkness" was produced in London a season ago with Leslie Banks in the title role. It is the best play to reach Broadway from England in some time, and considering what our local dramatists have been turning out this season, it deserves at least a few well modulated cheers.